

Embedded

by oldmule

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Summary: Ruth has to step beyond the role of desk spook and venture undercover, putting her in a position Harry is not at all happy about.

## 1. Chapter 1

\*\*I appear to be mired in a Harry shaped hole. I've done this story before from the opposite point of view, but thought it was worth a go this way round. \*\*

\*\*I hope it's sufficiently varied. Set around the end of S4, but with Adam in good health!  
><strong>

\*\*And to the reviewer who seems to believe that I don't care for readers, only for reviewers, can I just point out that if I only cared about reviews then I wouldn't lose the opportunity of them by posting every chapter as soon as it's written. I write because I need to and if you choose to review then I thank you for it and if you choose to read I hope you enjoy it.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Ruth felt distinctly uncomfortable. She felt railroaded. In fact, that is exactly what she had been - railroaded.<p>

"You knew him, Ruth. You're perfect," claimed Adam.

"More than knew him," smirked Zaf, eyebrows stratospheric.

"I don't think it's a good idea," she said, not for the first time.

"It's a great idea," and with that Zaf picked up the files and he and Adam headed for the meeting room, "... bet you Harry thinks so."

Harry. Oh god, Harry.

Could this get any worse, Ruth wondered.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what do you think?"<p>

Harry sat.

It was a good plan. The best plan available. He would be a fool not to agree.

"This isn't Ruth's field. I'm not convinced it's suited to her ... particular skills."

"Oh, come on, Harry, she'll be great," buzzed Zaf.

"Look how convincingly she talked Angela Wells down," enthused Adam, in their tag team presentation.

"That was different."

Uncharacteristically Harry seemed to be not moving on the subject.

He looked at Jo.

"What do you think?"

She hesitated and glanced at Ruth, who was eternally gratefully that at least one person in the room had bothered to acknowledge her existence.

"I'd suggest Ros for it, but it's obvious Ruth is by far the best candidate."

With impeccable timing, Ros entered.

"This better be something to do with translating Wu, or my nose will feel seriously out of joint."

Adam slid the file across the table.

"Johnny Featherstone. Believed to be at the centre of the Capital Dawn project. He's the money man. Financial whizzkid responsible for funding them, increasing coffers and doubling supporters with financial incentives.

Ros skimmed through the paperwork quickly as Zaf changed the image on the wall behind Harry's head.

"Fourteen years ago. Johnny Featherstone, first year Oxford undergraduateâ€|"

The picture was of a young, heavily bearded man on a bike. He was scruffy, startled and unkempt.

"Acclaimed mathematical genius and University boyfriend of..."

Zaf, with undisguised relish "...â€|Ruth Evershed."

All eyes turned to Ruth, again.

Except Ros who gazed at the picture with disdain.

"Yep, fair enough, he's all yours Ruth! " And with that she got up and headed out again, "Any tips you need, just shout."

"Oh, come on, Harry, it's perfect," insisted Adam, "Old college lovers, coincidentally reunited."

"A few nights out, few drinks, bit of reminiscing and bob's your uncle..." grinned Zaf.

"Ruth's \_embedded\_ in the organisation we've been trying to bring down since last November!"

Harry was not keen on the term 'embedded'.

But how could he say no to this, when if it were anyone else they wouldn't even be having this conversation? How could he say no to this when his main reasons for wanting to say no, were his own personal feelings?

"Ruth?" he asked.

"Thank you, yes, I am in the room," she muttered.

"Do you think you can make this work?"

"Of course, I'm not totally incapable."

She wasn't sure and she wasn't willing. But they did not need to know that. Besides which, she was decidedly sick of being underestimated.

"Fine," stated Harry getting up and leaving the room.

Adam and Zaf were beside themselves.

"Right, Ruth. You're on!"

## 2. Chapter 2

**\*\*Short and Harry centric.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>"There's no fool like an old fool."<p>

Had he said it out loud. No matter. There was no one present to hear.

He cradled the glass of scotch and leant against the edge of his desk.

It was true. He was being foolish. He had been for some time nowâ€|

but somehow he just couldn't get past it.

He was too old for her. He was her boss. He had a â€|what was that newfangled HR phrase... Duty of care! He had a duty of care towards her and that shouldn't involve thoughts of bending her over his desk.

He laughed aloud at the idea.

"Get over yourself, Harry."

There was just something about her.

That vitality, that sparkle, that vibrance he felt when she was near. Or was it the smile, which promised untold mischief. Or those eyes, so sharp, crystalline, all seeing, dancing eyes. Or that expression that took hold of her when she found something: when she knew her own bloody genius. Was it the smell of her when she breezed into his office; or the compassion that never left her, that even now the service still hadn't managed to destroy.

Was he simply craving all the optimism and naivety and empathy that she had ... and he had lost.

Who was he kidding, naïve and empathic, Harry Pearce!

He found himself smiling, smiling into the whiskey glass.

Sometimes he caught her looking at him and wondered. He wondered when her hand trailed across his on the bus. He wondered when she smiled at him that night, when he returned from suspension. But she smiled at all of them. She loved all of them, ministered to them and their problems. He regularly saw her small touches of sympathy and support.

He was no different.

It was vain to think otherwise.

And yet he was doing it again. This thing he did. Drinking, thinking, loving.

And it had to stop.

He had to stop it.

He had no right to think of her this way.

No hope.

### 3. Ruth

\*\*Ruth centric! ...and thanks for the supportive comments.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>She wanted to prove herself.<p>

Because all she craved was approval. His approval.

All the adrenalin bursts in the world were as nothing compared to the thrill of knowing he was proud of her; that she had pleased him.

But why was his opinion so important.

He was her boss. Of course she wanted to impress him. She'd wanted to impress her father in the same way.

No, Ruth, not the same way.

Not the same way at all.

A father figure doesn't make your temperature fly through the roof when he gets within three feet. A father figure doesn't make you feel â€|like this!

She took a deep, supposedly calming breath.

She had to get past thisâ€|this â€| "Crush."

Had she said it out loud. Zaf glanced around at her, confused.

Shit, she had.

For god's sake, Ruth, get a grip! You're not a teenager.

He's your boss. The Boss. Harry Pearce.

The man they all talk about. The 'legend' whose file you know back to front. The adulterer. The man who would eat you for breakfast.

If he were ever even vaguely interested.

Which he's not.

How could he be.

Young, naïve, clumsy, clueless.

Ruth.

But sometimes he looked her, just sometimes she caught himâ€| and his eyes, they held her, like a spider catching a fly and she wonderedâ€| Well, she wondered later, when she had calmed down, when she had got over the thrill of it, the power of it, the raging excitement of it.

She wondered what it would be like, trapped in that hazel gaze, hypnotised, held, waiting for him to make his move, waiting for him to pounce. And she wondered if she could please him.

Stop it!

And now here she was about to be launched as the field spook she was never meant to be.

And him â€| how little faith in her he had shown in the meeting. He clearly had only misgivings over her powers of seduction. Even with an ex bloody boyfriend.

Well, she would prove herself.

Mata Hari she may not be; Harry sodding Pearce she may not be; but she knew enough.

And if she was going to do a job, she was going to do it well.

And then he'd be impressed.

#### 4. Chapter 4

"Ruth Davidson nee Evershed. Divorced independent IT consultant. No children."

Malcolm handed her the purse containing credit cards, driving licence, business cards.

"It's not quite Classics, is it?" she said, surprised by the abrupt change in career path.

"Didn't think a librarian would quite cut it, Ruth," Zaf smirked.

"They use a company called GT Technologies as a cover. You're going to cold call them and offer a free consultation," instructed Adam, "And guess who's going to be there when you do?"

Zaf slid across a picture of a now somewhat more smartly dressed Johnny Featherstone, than the one they had last witnessed from his university days, though his head was bent and his face hidden.

"He never did like his photo taken," said Ruth.

"I'm not surprised," snarled Ros, passing Harry who was hovering in the doorway, neither in, nor out. She carried in a smart blue, tailored trousersuit and offered it to Ruth, who shook her head.

"I need a skirt. A short one."

Adam and Zaf shared a look.

"And a red basque."

Malcolm spluttered. Zaf grinned. Ros merely nodded.

Ruth turned back to Adam, "And an apartment with lots of glass."

"Ruth?" Adam began the question.

"I know what he likes, Adam. And after all that's why you want me to this."

"Okay. You'll have it all by this afternoon. Once you've made the initial contact don't push it, let it pan out at his pace, okay?"

"I understand," she said, walking out of the forgery suite, head

down.

"It's always the quiet ones," murmured Zaf under his breath.

"You alright?" Ros asked Harry, as she passed him in the doorway.

"Fine," he muttered as he turned away, "â€¦just a bit hot."

## 5. Chapter 5

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph!"

Zaf turned to the security guard whose eyes had far exceeded wide. He followed his gaze.

It was Ruth, but not quite as they were used to seeing her.

"Afternoon, Miss Evershed," said the security guard, enthusiastically.

"Hi Jim, how's Katy, is she back at school now?"

"Yep, she's right as rain, thanks for asking."

She smiled that gentle, compassionate smile.

He beamed as she passed, his eyes sliding down to the hem of the skirt in appreciation.

"Ready?" asked Zaf, here to lead her to the car they had allocated to Ruth Davidson, IT consultant.

She nodded, "As I'll ever be."

"You look good, Ruth."

"Do I?"

"You do," he smiled.

She loved Zaf. She loved his playfulness, his cheekiness. She felt safe with him, for all his flirting.

"Ruth!"

As if from nowhere Harry appeared.

Striding towards them, he held out a hand to Zaf, who dropped the keys into it. Dismissed.

Harry looked down at the keys in his hand. He was not looking at the keys. He was looking at heels and calves, and knees and the beginnings of thighs.

\_Pull yourself together man!\_

"Ruthâ€¦"

"Yes, Harry."

\_He can't even look at me.\_

He looked up at her. At those eyes.

"You don't have to do this."

"Yes I do. I'm the only one with the connection."

"I don't want you to feel â€|obliged, Ruth."

"I don't. And it's you that doesn't need to do this, Harry."

"This?"

"This duty of care â€|thing."

\_Hitting the nail right on the head. How very Ruth.\_

"That's not the job we're in, Harry. I'm as capable as the rest of the team."

"Believe me, Ruth, I have no doubts as to your capabilities."

"Then let me go do this."

A deep breath and his hand offers the keys.

She takes them and as ever, the lightening in the touch passes through them both.

"Be careful," he says.

She looks up at him sharply, "Would you say that to Adam in the same circumstances?"

"No Ruth," he concedes as she opens the drivers door, "â€|but he doesn't look that good in a skirt."

And as he walks away he curses himself for being so flippant.

And as she closes the door, she smiles. Maybe he looked after all.

## 6. Chapter 6

"What's happening?' Harry leans over Adam's shoulder, peering at the CCTV of an exterior office complex.

"She went in twenty minutes ago."

He rubs a hand across his face.

"Don't worry, Harry, she'll be fine."

"Will she? â€|She's not like us, Adam."



"No," the younger man smiles, "she's better."

And Harry can't argue.

Forty five minutes later Ruth walks from the building, gets in her car and drives away.

Adam steps into Harry's office.

"They're meeting for drinks at seven."

"Where?"

"Bar in Hampstead."

Harry nods.

At seven o'clock promptly he is out of his office and hovering.

Zaf is in an Obs van parked in the street outside the bar. They have eyes on the exterior and Jo behind the bar on the inside.

A cab pulls up outside the club and Ruth steps out. If her business suit had caused consternation earlier, this latest outfit is even more

"Wow," is all that Adam can manage.

Ros nods in appreciation.

In the obs van Zaf whistles.

As Ruth makes her way to the door a figure crosses from the shadows towards her. He leans in, kissing her on the cheek.

"Who the hell's that?" asks Harry anxiously, peering at the monitor.

Adam zooms in.

"I think that's Johnny Featherstone."

"It is Ros's turn to whistle.

The clothes are sharp and well fitting and pull across a taught, honed physique. The beard is gone, revealing beneath a swarthy, handsome, strong face.

"He's filled out nicely," murmurs Ros, appreciatively, "if I'd known that"

Harry stares at the screen.

He feels old.

And rather foolish.

\* \* \*

><p>"Go home," Adam had said. "We've got this. They're just going to have a drink and hopefully agree to meet again."<p>

Harry had gone home. To have stayed would have looked odd. He made Adam promise to keep him informed.

And so he sits at home. And finds himself in the dark with a glass in his hand and Dusty Springfield to keep him company. He tries to empty his mind but Dusty keeps prodding, prompting, provoking him.

At ten o'clock his mobile buzzes. It is Adam.

"They've just arrived at Ruth's apartment."

"What?'

"They've gone back to hers. Give her her due, Harry, I told you she was good."

A hand rubs over his chin, over his eyes, over the back of his neck, over his head. And Dusty taunts with every apt, painful lyric.

If this was Ros, or even Jo, he would be sat working through reports: his concern tempered if it was Jo; almost non-existent if it was Ros - woe betide anyone who crossed her.

Every word. Every sodding word. Can you not sing something irrelevant.

He turns off the music. He stands by the window. He stands in the kitchen. He stands by the door. He looks at his phone and he pours another drink.

A large one.

The rest of the bottle.

He feels the pressure on his chest and tries not to think about her. Because at this moment nothing matters more.

It's a longing that he feels.

The longing to protect.

But that's not what he is doing.

She is something special, to the section. She's something special to him. And yet he is tarnishing her with the same dirty brush as the rest of them.

He is taking her naivety, her spirit and using it.

Or is he just afraid that she might enjoy it.

Either way, Harry Pearce decides he doesn't like himself very much.

**\*\*Short one to keep you going...though I'm not sure this one will go down quite as well!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>It's easier that she expects.<p>

He's not a stranger.

They have history.

She knew, even as Adam told her not to rush, that this would happen quickly. She had always been able to manoeuvre Johnny in whichever direction she so desired – especially in a short skirt.

His transformation is no surprise to her, not as it was to Harry and the team.

He was always beautifully built, it was just well hidden under the shocking clothes he chose to wear. His face was always classically handsome, merely shielded from view. It had never been difficult to enjoy him physically and his intellect was as sharp and strong and impressive as his abs.

It was just the rest of him that Ruth had always had a problem with.

And as Harry stands, leaning against his window frame, sleepless and statuesque through the night, Ruth looks out of the large picture window at the distant lights of the city and lets her former lover back into her life for the sake of the service.

For her she knows it means nothing.

For him the twin terrors of regret and jealousy continue unabated to eat, chew and gnaw at his insides.

## 8. Chapter 8

"You look exhausted," Adam says, as Harry sweeps onto the grid after suffering an interminably long breakfast meeting with the home secretary.

"Thought it was Ruth pulling the all nighter," smirks Zaf.

One look is enough.

"Have you heard from her?"

"She called in at seven, straight after Featherstone left."

"And?"

"No Intel so far."

"Never mind the intel!", Harry snaps, "How is she?"

"Fine. She's fine, Harry. Don't worry."

Ruth is fine.

And well reminded of why she had ditched Johnny in the first place. He was arrogant, controlling and compassionless.

In hindsight she could recognise that, at the time, she had been easily swayed by the combination of genius and naturally beautiful pecs.

But to him then, as now, numbers mattered more than people. All he could talk about was his precious algorithms: his body came a close second.

She looks out of the window, still wet from the shower. She thinks about standing on the roof of Thames House. She thinks of talk about philosophers and musicians, of politics and people. She thinks how vast Harry makes the world seem and yet how close and precious her part in it.

And she wishes he was here right now.

\* \* \*

><p>"I need to talk to her, Adam."<p>

Harry slides closed his office door.

"I've told you, stop worrying."

"She's out of her depth."

"No, Harry, she's across this. All we need is access to Featherstone's computer and then we can track every part of the chain. You can't think about pulling her out now."

Harry turns away, glaring through the blinds across the grid.

Adam can feel the tension burning in him, can witness the flex of his fist, the white of his knuckles.

"What's this about, Harry?"

His answer is only silence.

"She's more than a capable officer, inexperienced admittedly, but there's no relevant danger. You wouldn't be behaving like this with anyone else. Why so with Ruth?"

"Tell me where she is, Adam."

"Harry, you can't risk this operation..."

"Now!"

Zaf and Jo look up from the grid, alerted by the shout.

"Not a happy bunny," Zaf observes.

And Jo believes she knows why.

\* \* \*

><p>Ruth walks towards the car, parked outside the apartment. She looks up at the facade of windows high above and wonders what can and cannot be seen.<p>

When her neck cranes back down she sees him.

"What is it?" She asks, shocked at his appearance.

"Ruth..."

"You shouldn't be here, Harry."

"I know."

"Go, please."

"Shit!" At the opposite side of the square Ros lashes out at the steering wheel of the surveillance vehicle.

Ruth turns away from him, reaching for the car door but he blocks her way. And his presence at once both thrills and alarms her.

"Please, you have to go. I've got a job to do."

He reaches out a hand towards her.

"Ruth!"

But it is not Harry's voice calling her name.

It is Johnny's. And he is striding powerfully across the car park towards them.

"What the hell are you're doing? Get your hands off her!"

Harry holds his ground as Ruth steps towards the younger man, "Johnny it's fine, he's â€"

But he's already past her and in Harry's face.

"Who the hell do you think you are?"

This is no maths geek.

"I'm her husband!" snarls Harry, "Who the hell are you!?"

"Ex husband!" Ruth bites.

Johnny looks between the two of them, anger abating.

And then he laughs.

"Thisâ€|?" he nods at Harry, "This is James?"

Ruth nods, "I told you he was a pain in the arse."

"Yeah but you didn't tell me the rest. Brings a whole new meaning to

'my old man'!"

"Oh, a comedian." Harry closes the distance between them once more, "I think you've said enough."

"Is that right, granddad?" Johnny spits back, testosterone rising.

Harry turns to Ruth, nodding up towards the apartment, "If you think you're staying here with me keep paying the bills, while you shack up with the nearest passing jock strap, you can think again, Ruth. A week and then you're out. How's that for a pain in the arse?"

And with a sneer he turns and walks away, cursing with every step, the jeopardy he may have put her in.

Johnny looks at her and waits.

"What can I say, " she shrugs, "I didn't marry him for his body."

The laughter echoes across the car park.

## 9. Chapter 9

\*\*Sorry - an inordinate amount of time between chapters for me! A short one. But I will do my damndest to finish this today or tomorrow. And major thanks for all the support.  
><strong>

\* \* \*

><p>Harry strides away and with each step the adrenalin abates.<p>

Somewhere beyond his anger at himself, he warms with pride at Ruth's speed of thought and her ability, with one swift comment, to pander both to Johnny's vanity and yet denigrate her ex husband.

He has never doubted her skill.

All of this is not about Ruth's shortcomings. It is about his.

"What in the name of good god was that!" Ros steps in alongside him, keeping pace.

His eyes never leave the road ahead.

"Progress, Ros. Things are moving on."

"Progress, my arse. A mistake is what it was. A major break in procedure, Harry, and you know it!"

He walks on alone.

How very right she is.

He does not see Adam, until unbidden he sits in the chair opposite Harry's desk, tilts his head and raises his eyebrows.

"I don't know what you're up to...?"

Harry considers his answer.

"â€|But it's worked," Adam grins.

Zaf sticks his head around the door, "She's on her way over there now. Jo's going to meet her with the software."

A wise enough man, Harry reigns in his curiosity and waits for this to play out.

"Ruth called," Adam explains, "Seeing as she's due to be imminently homeless, thanks to her overbearing ex, her knight in shining armour, Mr Johnny Featherstone, has offered to let her stay with him until she gets sorted with a new place."

Harry nods.

"Bloody genius," declares Zaf and disappears.

"Nice one, Harry," Adam adds, vacating the chair.

Harry sits.

Well, you got away with that one, Pearce. Nearly screwed the whole operation and yet came out smelling of roses.

And what have you achieved?

Ruth. Embedded. In another man's home.

At that moment in time a sense of satisfaction, is a sense sadly lacking from Harry Pearce.

## 10. Chapter 10

Ruth enters the cafÃ©, crosses to the counter and orders a skinny cortado to go.

"Anything with that?" asks the pretty girl behind the counter.

"Lemon drizzle."

"It'd be rude not to," the girl smiles.

It is Jo.

She bags it and hands it to Ruth, followed by a serviette, "You'll probably be needing this..."

Ruth feels the small flash drive wrapped within it.

"Thanks."

She slips it into her pocket, glancing around as the door closes behind the only other customer.

"Why didn't anyone warn me what Harry was up to?"

"I don't think anyone knew...including Harry. That's eight twenty, please?"

"What do you mean?"

Ruth hands her ten pounds.

"He's a little stressed."

"I can do it, it's not a problem," Rush insists. She is frustrated and feeling increasingly annoyed.

"It's not that, Ruth. I think this is personal."

"Personal?"

A customer enters.

"He's just been over protective," Jo whispers.

This is neither the time, nor place to say more.

"Your change and your cortado," she concludes with a smile, "Enjoy."

Ruth walks away, down the street, towards Johnny Featherstone. But her mind is all Harry.

Overly protective.

Equals father figure.

Equals paternal feelings.

And her heart sinks a little bit.

\* \* \*

><p>She walks into Johnny's designer house: a symbol of his self obsessed pretensions.<p>

"Wow, it's stunning," she lies, walking from one room to the other, clocking his laptop on the kitchen island, "Who would have thought it from a maths geek!"

He laughs and grabs her by the waist, one hand sliding to the hem of the latest short skirt.

"I won't overstay my welcome, I promise," she smiles, eyes twinkling at him.

"Stay as long as you like, Ruthieâ€|" he says between kisses, "â€|there's just one conditionâ€|."

And his lips slide to her ear, whispering the words.

\* \* \*



><p>"Status?" demands Harry.<p>

"Ros is making a drop."

"A drop?" asks Harry, puzzled. He thought Jo was delivering the software.

"No, not the flash drive," Zaf grins, "it's a little something Ruth's requested."

At that moment Jo enters through the pods, "It's done," she announces.

Adam nods.

"Here we goâ€¦" Zaf indicates the monitor. It is the exterior of Johnny's house.

They all gather, watching Ros cross to the door, a small package in hand. She knocks and waits.

"She can even make a delivery uniform look good," Adam comments wryly.

Harry's eyes never leave the screen. It's not Ros he's thinking about.

The door opens. Ruth is wearing only a shirt. A man's shirt.

"Talking of looking goodâ€¦" Zaf grins.

Jo digs him in the ribs and glances at Harry, whose jaw is tightening exponentially by the minute.

Ros hands Ruth the machine to sign for delivery. Something is said briefly and Ruth turns away.

"What's in the package?" Harry asks, as Ruth closes the door.

"Underwear," smirks Zaf.

An excited Malcolm bursts onto the grid, "I've got it!"

"Not now!" Harry snaps.

"Butâ€¦I've ..."

Jo gives him a warning look.

"Underwear?" repeats Harry, jaw clenched.

"A variation in basque's and suspenders, seems to be the order of the day," adds Adam, eyes wide.

Jo glances at Harry. She is the only one who hears his hushed "Dear god!" as he turns away.

Adam's phone rings.

Malcolm tries once more, "Harry, I need to â€|"

"It's Ros..." calls Adam, listening briefly before he ends the call, "We're in!"

Malcolm sighs with exasperation, "That's what I've been trying to tell you. Ruth's loaded the software â€" I've got access to everything and everyone linked to Capital Dawn!"

"Get in, Ruth," Zaf's hand punches the table.

"Good girl," breathes Harry.

Now...now he can get her out of there.

Preferably before that bloody package gets opened!

## 11. Chapter 11

"No!"

"The job's done!"

"If we take her out now, how will that look? Suspicious, is how it'll look. Convenient, is how it'll look. He's not stupid, Harry, he's a boy genius, for god's sake!"

"She can't do anymore."

"She can stay long enough to find a flat and the for the two of them to get bored with each other."

"He's not going to get bored with her, why would he?!"

"We are not extracting her now, for no reason."

The two men stare across the office at each other.

Harry's fists clenched. Adam leaning against the desk.

"She stays," says Adam and marches to the door.

"Go home, Harry. Have a drink. Sleep. Ruth is fine."

But Harry doesn't go home. He stands across the road from the house and looks through the large glass windows, but nothingâ€|no oneâ€| can be seen.

When he does finally go, he climbs on the treadmill in his spare room and he runs. Runs until his lungs feel seared and scorched. Runs until there is nothing left in his legs. Runs to forget. Runs to not think.

Runs to stop every accursed thought that is going through his sad and sorry head.

## 12. Chapter 12

\*\*Sorry short again, but I was asked for some more Ruth and so here she is. Hope it does the trick. \*\*

\*\*Some progression to come in the next chapter, I think.

><strong>

\* \* \*

><p>Ruth looks at the ceiling and lets her thoughts run unleashed.<p>

She has no desire to look at the toned torso lying beside her. She dislikes the inside of him and somehow that taints all the rest.

She has achieved what she has been sent here to do.

She has done it quickly and efficiently.

She had proved herself in the field.

Born spook.

Born spook, he'd said, "You're a born spook, Ruth," as he stood so very close. "Don't you feel proud?"

She hopes he feels proud now. Hopes he feels pleased. Relieved. Appreciative.

She imagines his smile and the warmth in his eyes, 'Well done, Ruth,' she hears.

And she feels the thrill.

...Followed by the interminable sadness that comes from the knowledge that she won't see him, not for weeks possibly. She knows what has to be done. She has to stay where she is and listen to Johnny's monologues and feel his hands roving and pawing.

He stirs in bed and throws an arm around her, dragging her down to him.

And all she really wants is to put on her old tattered pyjamas, her fluffy slippers and be herself and read a book.

And think about Harry.

## 13. Chapter 13

"Oh, No!"

Adam and Jo quickly cross the grid to Ros.

"What's up?"

"Harryâ€¦ I think he's going all Lear on us again."

They watch the cctv and see him step out of the shadows, cross the road to Johnny's house and knock on the door.

"Think it's more Othello, than Lear," murmurs Joe.

Ruth's face falters for a split second.

Silently he asks the question with a look.

Her eyes flick back and up to tell him that Johnny is upstairs.

"I needed to see you," he speaks with enough volume, so that he may be easily heard.

"Why are you here, James," she answers with feigned exasperation, wondering why indeed.

"They told me you'd goneâ€¦moved out."

"That's what you wanted wasn't it. No wait, sorry, that's what you threatened!"

"I didn't think you'd come here. With him."

"You'd prefer me on the streets!?"

"I'm sure you could find something appropriate to do!" he snaps back.

He glances upstairs for a moment, listening.

"Uncalled for," he says, apologetically, "and a bit rich coming from me, I know."

"Here's a damned sight better than anything you could ever afford."

"You didn't marry me for my money."

"No. Thing is, I don't actually know why I married you in the first place."

He steps up, into the doorway.

She hasn't got her heels on and he seems so much taller.

"Because you told me you loved me, Ruth â€¦ so much it hurt."

And he has her and she is caught for a moment. Caught in the hazel gaze.

She hears the bathroom door upstairs.

"Yep. And then it just hurt. And you became the pain."

"Please, Ruth. You know what I want. You know how sorry I am."

"You can't keep doing this, James."

"Just one chance, Ruth. Give me one chance to make it up to

you."

"How many more times, before you start listening!"

And with the approaching sound of footsteps at the top of the stairs, Harry backs her up, pinning her against the wall.

"Ruthâ€|" he whispers, his face close, his breathing heavy, "please, Ruthâ€|"

And she stares back, unsure what to say, what to do â€|until he is ripped away from her.

It takes only an infinitesimal moment of time for Harry Pearce to find himself sprawling on his back on the path, outside the house.

Johnny is standing over him.

After a sudden and brutal kick to the stomach, Johnny turns away and slams the door in Harry's face.

\* \* \*

><p>"What the hell was that?!" Exclaims Adam.<p>

"Where's Zaf?" Ros demands, "Get him round there, right now."

\* \* \*

><p>Ruth puts her hand to her eyes, trying to rid herself of the pained image of Harry's face as the kick landed â€|and to give herself time, time to figure out where this is all meant to be going.<p>

"Thank you," she says, looking finally at Johnny, "maybe now he'll get the message."

Pumped up, Johnny paces to the window and looks out.

"He's done this before?"

He watches as Harry drags himself up from the floor.

"Yes," she sighs, joining him.

And, as if he senses her there, Harry stops and turns back. He looks at her with the softest, most pleading, most loving of looks.

And she knows.

She knows where this is going. What he is doing.

"Thing is, this is different..." she says.

Johnny glances at her.

"He's never seen me with anybody else before. That's what hurting."

"No, please," Ruth stands in his way, "If anyone can get him to go,

it's me."

He hesitates.

"Sometimes words cut the deepest."

He smiles, "you would say that. You're such a classicist."

"Old habitsâ€|" she smiles and turns for the door.

She walks towards Harry: drawn like a moth to the light, a magnet to its pole.

He eases forward, subtly stepping, manoeuvring them, so that it is he who has his back towards the house.

"Are you alright?" he asks.

"Are you?" she glances to his stomach.

"Nothing a hot bath won't cure."

She is about to smile at him.

"Look annoyed and go."

She does and makes to walk away but he pulls her back and again she finds her back to the wall. He is standing in front of her, not too close to alert Johnny, but blocking her, so that neither of their faces can be directly seen from the house.

"I know what you're trying to do, Harry."

"Is it working?'

"I think it might."

"What do you need me to do?'

'Just what you're doingâ€| look persistent and desperate."

Harry smiles, "I can do that, Ruth."

And he knows he can, because he is.

"Now make to go back in again," he instructs.

She turns away and he lets them spin around until both are parallel, profile to the house. Visible.

He catches her hand and holds on to it.

"Please, Ruthâ€|" he says, acutely aware of the presence at the window opposite.

She looks away.

And still holding her hand, he reaches with his other into his jacket pocket.

"This is for you" | "

He produces a small, aged, calf skin book, wrapped in a simple white ribbon.

"Open it," he says, smiling tenderly.

She pulls the ribbon open and he takes it from her, the better that she can see the book.

"This is Dacier's translation of Horace," she says, in surprise, leafing through the pages with delicate reverence.

"Give me the chance, Ruth. Give me the chance to show you who I can be."

And for a moment she wonders who is speaking to her.

"I know you're with him, now," he nods to the house and Ruth is back in the legend.

"But I'm still here and I still want you."

He closes the book between her hands.

"Think about it, Ruth. Please."

He slowly slides his hands away, gently stroking hers as he does so.

Johnny has seen it all.

\* \* \*

><p>Ros says nothing, she merely swings around to Adam with arms outstretched, "You best give me a clue, because I'm lost."<p>

"Book club?" says Adam, unhelpfully.

Ros glares at him.

"He's trying to win her back."

They both turn to look at Jo.

"An Ex husband who still loves his wife. If he can prove to Featherstone that Ruth loves him too, she'll leave. No suspicion. No doubt."

"He's not going to believe that," Ros scoffs.

"I'm not so sure," murmurs Adam as he watches Ruth's face as she looks off after the departing Harry.

\* \* \*

><p>That night, when Johnny's hands start wondering over Ruth, she suggests how very tired she is.<p>

That night when he stirs, he catches her sitting by the window, the



book in her hand, a distracted expression on her face.

And when he gets up to the toilet at three in the morning he sees a figure standing in the shadows alert and watchful.

## 15. Chapter 15

"Yesâ€|" The phone is picked up.

"Malcolm, are we missing any intel from Capital Dawn?"

"Harry, Adam wants to speak to you."

"Answer me, Malcolm."

"No, the software is fulfilling its purpose."

The phone goes dead.

Harry shifts in his chair, rubs his hand over his face and reaches for the cold coffee in front of him.

"You look like shit."

"Thanks," he says as Adam plonks himself opposite.

"Gone rogue, Harry?"

Harry glowers at him.

"You just need to extract one of your agents, is that it?"

"That's it."

"It's not personal? Not over protective?"

"No. Purely cautionary."

"And you're not in love with her?"

"No."

Adam stands up.

"Bullshit, Harry."

He turns towards the door, "Whatever you're going to do next, it better work."

Harry doesn't know what he is going to do next. He is too tired. He has barely slept in three days.

He just knows this had to end.

\* \* \*

><p>"Where is he?" Ros asks.<p>

Zaf shrugs, "Lost track of him after the cafÃ©."

"And Ruth?"

"Still at the house."

"Then he'll be there, somewhere. Lurking about with a book."

\* \* \*

><p>Harry walks into the offices of GT Technologies, Capital Dawn's cover operation and declares that he, James Davidson, has a meeting with Johnny Featherstone.<p>

Johnny's face is worth the proverbial picture.

Gracelessly Harry is invited into what passes as an office and the two men stare across the room at each other. Between them sits Johnny's laptop, even now spilling his secrets to the grid.

"There's no comparison," Harry says eventually, "You've got me hands down... Looks, physique, age, money."

"Not much going for you at all, is there?" Johnny scoffs.

"I love her and you don't."

"Don't worry, granddad, I get all the loving I need from her."

"You don't want her."

"In that underwear, I most definitely do."

He sees the clenched jaw as he says it and knows the nerve has been well and truly hit.

"She's not in love with you, but I think she still is with me."

And now it's Harry's turn to target the nerve.

Johnny is silent.

"You're young. You can have the pick of anyone. You're not looking for a relationship. I imagine that's the last thing you need. And while the sex is good, it won't last. In fact, I bet it's tailing off already."

From the younger man's expression Harry thankfully knows he's right.

"If you want to, I have no doubt that you could easily persuade her to stay," Harry leans forward, his words quiet, "But I'm asking you not to, in fact, I'm begging you not to."

"You're not going to do it for me, why should you? But if you have any respect for her, any feeling for her, from now, or from the past, then at least ask her. Ask her what she wants."

Harry gets up from his seat.

"And if she says you, then fine. But if she has any feeling left for

me at all then please, let her go."

He strides from the building. It has taken all his self control not to pin the man to the wall and strangle him with his own tie. But the longer Johnny Featherstone remains in place, the longer the list of names and contacts that are fed back to them.

There is only one target now and that is Ruth.

And be it James or Harry, both are desperate to have her back.

And both know they are in love with her.

## 16. Chapter 16

The book lies in the living room, on a table by the window.

He flicks through the pages.

They are old and brittle and brown.

Lying within, almost two thirds of the way through he finds it.

The handwritten note.

\_Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two  
bodies.\_

\_Aristotle\_

He closes the book and lays it back down.

## 17. Chapter 17

"Hi," calls Ruth as she walks into the house.

"Drink?" Johnny shouts from the kitchen.

"Why not."

He walks into the room carrying two full champagne glasses.

"Oh, we're celebrating?" she smiles questioningly.

"We certainly are."

And he takes the book from the table and tosses it carelessly across the room.

He sees Ruth's anxious look after it.

"Sorry, it's not important is it?"

She shrugs, "you know me and books," and she goes to pick it up.

He stands the champagne glasses in its place.

"I know, I couldn't get near your bed half the time for your bloody

books," he grins as he loosens his tie.

"The dangers of literature, what can I say."

"Who needed a bed though, hey!?"

He throws the tie on the sofa and walks towards her, gently taking the book from her hands, "â€|The one James gave you?"

She nods.

"I saw his note to you, Ruthie."

Her eyes flick up to him.

"One soul, two bodies?" he says it, but there is derision in his tone.

"He always fancied himself as something of a poet," she smiles, trying to pick her way through and find the right words.

"Are you still in love with him?"

And here it is: the escape route. She hesitates. She stays silent.

"You are, aren't you?"

"It's hard to just switch off your feelingsâ€| even after someone's hurt you," she ventures sadly.

"You hurt me, Ruthie."

"You were nineteen and more interested in logarithms than love."

He laughs, "Fair point. Not one for romance, me. Althoughâ€| I thinkâ€| you clearly are."

He leaves the comment hanging.

She breathes deeply.

"You've been great, Johnny and thisâ€|" she smiles warmly at him, "has been fun. But... I need to try again."

"I know," he says quietly.

She turns away to gaze out of the large window at the night beyond and she wonders if Harry is out there once more.

"I need to give him the chance. To know once and for all."

"I understand."

Ruth feels the promise of freedom, of release, of return.

She picks up the champagne glass and takes a drink.

She feels his hand snake around her waist and grab her wrist, sending the glass crashing to the floor. "You'll leave when I want you to,"

he hisses in her ear, twisting her forcefully to face him, "And right now, Ruthie, I don't want you to."

"Johnny, pleaseâ€|" She's trying to think logically but he's pushing her back, closer to the window.

And he knows, because he has already seen him out there, that James Davidson, is standing across the road witnessing this.

And that does it for Johnny Featherstone.

That really does it for him.

He swipes the second glass of champagne to the floor and pushes Ruth over the table facing the window, his knee forcing its way between her legs, his free hand thrusting viciously up her skirt. And he smiles out into the night.

"Step away from her right now."

It is a cold, hard voice.

A cold hard voice that is right behind him.

## 18. Chapter 18

Even before Johnny has the chance to turn, the tie is around his neck.

Pulled taught and tight it forces his head back where he feels the rhythm of calm, even breathing against his cheek.

Ruth pushes herself to her feet, glancing at the blood on her hand.

She turns. Harry's eyes find hers.

He twists tighter.

Johnny moans and gasps for air, an arm flailing wildly.

He faces his precious window. Looking out. Seeing reflected in the glass the cold, hard eyes of the man behind him who is bleeding him of his life.

The arm flails less.

Ruth steps forward.

"Jamesâ€|" she says quietly and it brings both of them back. Back to procedure. Back to the means â€|" and not the end.

The pressure eases slightly. Johnny forces what limited air he can get into his beleaguered lungs.

Harry leans closer.

"Do I have your attention?"

Johnny's wide eyes strain to acknowledge him, his voice still incapable, his head held too tight to nod.

"This is what's going to happen!" Harry whispers, "Ruth is coming home, with me, where I will do my damndest to make her happy and treat her with the respect she deserves," he pulls the tie taut once more, "and you, you piece of shit, will not see, speak to, or come near either of us again."

With one swift and graceful move he swings Johnny round to face him.

"Do you understand?"

A barely breathing Johnny nods his assent.

"That's good," says Harry, looking past him at Ruth.

He yanks the tie down, doubling Johnny over and with full force thrusts his knee, with a sickening crack, into Johnny's gasping face.

Body and tie drop to the floor.

Harry steps over them to Ruth, gently leading her away.

"Wait," she says at the door and crosses back towards the prone figure.

She bends down, her hand reaching out and she picks up the book that has fallen close by.

She returns to Harry, "Horace is wasted on him," she smiles. "Now let's go."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Okay, so that's the easy bit - now all they've got to do is talk to each other without any misunderstandings. Yeah, right!<strong>

## 19. Chapter 19

\*\*Can't tell you how entertaining all your reviews are as I write this...particularly the highly succinct and heartfelt 'Johnny is scum, and I hope Harry decks him!' \*\*

\*\*Thank you.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Harry lifts the phone.<p>

"It's done," he says.

"Have you blown cover?" asks Adam.

"No."

"Is Ruth alright?"

She hears the question and nods.

"She says to tell you she's fine."

"Good. You should see -"

A car screeches to a halt alongside them, "Need a lift," grins Zaf.

"Here's here," Harry says abruptly and ends the call.

Zaf opens the back door for Ruth, "Alright?" he asks tenderly.

"I'll live," she smiles.

"Take her home."

She looks questioningly at Harry.

"I need to walk, " he says.

"Harryâ€¦thank you."

She wants to say more but there's where to start, what to say, standing in the middle of the street with Zaf waiting.

"You did well, Ruth," his tone is warm and mellow and rich, "I told youâ€¦born spook."

He touches her gently on the elbow, his other hand on the door.

For a moment she stares into that hazel gaze and then dips her head, getting into the car.

As it drives away he stands watching.

And then he pulls on his gloves.

\* \* \*

><p>Ruth sits on her sofa, her legs tucked up, arms clasped around them. Her hair is still damp from the bath, her face still flushed from its heat. She wears her tattered pyjamas and her fluffy slippers. Curled up beside her is Fidget.<p>

In front of her on the coffee table lies Horace.

Between her fingers she holds the piece of paper: she frets at it, turns it, folds it, straightens it and reads it once more.

A single soul.

Aristotle and Horace and Andre Dacier.

Who knew her so well.

Who was there, like an avenging angel.

Who's approval had she sought and found and won.

"Crush," she snorts.

Fidget looks at her.

"Did I say that out loud?" she asks the cat.

Disinterested Fidget rises, stretches and jumps down from the sofa.

A crush!

A crush it most certainly isn't. She knows that now.

All he had said was 'Well done'.

But approval isn't enough any more.

Because she knows that she's in love with him.

\* \* \*

><p>Harry pushes off his shoes and falls on to the bed.<p>

He has walked the three miles home.

Walked to let the fury abate, walked to bring himself down, walked to consider the sheer unprofessionalism of his behaviour over the past thirty six hours.

And now he is done walking and thinking.

He is done.

After three sleepless nights his body and his mind close down. And fully clothed he sleeps.

## 20. Chapter 20

"Meeting room debrief," announces Adam, striding across the grid.

"Harry!" he calls, passing the office but not stopping.

Six of them sit around the table. Harry and Ruth at either end, Adam sits between them.

"So," he says, "The Capital Dawn operationâ€|."

There is a slightly uncomfortable silence.

"Intel?" he looks at Ros.

"Still coming in. They have no idea we have total access. There's enough there to keep section C and special branch busy for the next six months."

"Featherstone?" asks Adam, of Zaf.



"Arrived for work at GT Technologies this morning, as usual" |

He looks around at them and grins, "Oh, apart from the broken nose."

Ros glances at Harry. His face emotionless.

Adam turns to Ruth and it is his turn to smile, "Ruth, What can we say, you did a brilliant job."

"Hardly a desk spook, anymore," Zaf adds.

Jo beams and Ros nods begrudgingly.

"I know Fiona would have been proud of you," Adam adds quietly.

Ruth smiles warmly, "Thank you." She lays a gentle hand upon his arm.

Harry's face, still a mask, witnesses the touch.

And his heart feels full for her; full \_of\_ her; full and aching.

"Harry" | Adam turns to him.

"Adam."

"Your part in all this."

"Yes."

The mask is intact.

"You went rather " off piste."

"More abominable snowman," Ros mutters.

"Do you have anything to say about it?"

Harry's jaw clenches and he looks challenging at Adam before he speaks.

"I broke procedure and I endangered the operation." He glances around the room, "I apologise to you all, for that."

Five sets of eyes stare at him with surprise.

"But I would do it again."

He turns to look at Ruth.

"Ruth, I had and have, no doubt whatsoever in your abilities. You are a valuable asset here on the grid and I firmly believe, having so well accomplished your task, that your skills were being wasted waiting out time before extraction."

And back to Adam,

"That's why I made the decision to expedite."

He stands up.

"And as far as I know, Mr Carter, I am still the one in charge here. Debrief over."

They watch his back as he strides away.

"Wow, you've got to give it to him," says Ros.

## 21. Chapter 21

At least half a dozen times that day Ruth suppressed the urge to walk into his office.

It wasn't like she knew what she would say; or even if she'd say anything.

She just knew she wanted to be there.

But Harry had closed himself off, buried behind a stack of paperwork, which acted as a mighty barrier suggesting to them all that he did not want to be disturbed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Coffee out?" Jo suggests to Ruth, seeing her distracted expression not for the first time.<p>

"If you throw in a cake."

"Lemon drizzle?" smiles Jo.

"Be rude not to."

They sit outside at a table in the winter sunshine, looking across the river.

"Are you sure you're okay, Ruth?"

"I had a lot of hot sex with a man who thinks of a woman as a basque wearing receptacle and turns out to be an utter bastard."

"You're fine, then?"

"Yep."

They smile at each other.

"Good job they're not all like that."

Jo watches for a response to her prompt. But nothing is forthcoming. She's not going to give up that easily.

"Harry was impressive this morning."

Ruth's face appears to have borrowed Harry's mask.

"Remind me never to play poker with him."

"What do you mean?"

And Jo has a nibble. The fish are biting. The bait is taken.

"Harry and all that bollocks about time and wasted skills."

"What do you mean â€"

"Not that I'm saying you're not skilled, Ruth, my god you are."

"Jo, I'm not sure I know â€"

"And I'm not saying Harry doesn't think you're amazing. And skilled. And the rest! But reallyâ€|who's he trying to fool?"

Ruth again tries to interject.

"I'll go get the bill," announces Jo and she is gone.

\* \* \*

><p>"Harry?"<p>

"Go away. Ros"

The door to the office slides shut. Ros is still on the inside.

"I'm busy."

"You're an old fool, Harry."

"I am regularly of the same opinion," he glances up at her, "Thank you for your candour. Goodbye."

She steps to his desk and half throws a dvd onto it.

"If you know what's good for you, watch that."

And then she is gone.

Harry gives the disc a cursory glance and continues with his reports.

\* \* \*

><p>"Shall we?" Jo says, grabbing her bag.<p>

Ruth snatches at it and pulls Jo back down to the table.

"No, let's not. What are you trying to say Jo?"

The younger woman suppresses the smile that's close to her lips.

"Wellâ€|you know...Harry."

"Harry, what?"

"Dancing around you."

"What?"

"Harry, Ruth. Harry, our boss. Harry, head of section D."

"What about him?"

"\_Then must you speak, Ruth\_..."

"Of what?...Jo, please!"

"\_Of one that loved not wisely, but too well\_â€|"

Ruth's eyes are fixed on Jo as she stands and puts her bag on her shoulder.

"\_Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought, perplexed in the extreme\_â€| "

And smiling, Jo is walking away.

\* \* \*

><p>"For god's sake," Harry chunters as the disc falls to the floor along with three pending files.<p>

He picks them up.

'\_Harry's eyes only' \_is handwritten in marker pen across it.

With a sigh, he loads the disc and waits for it to boot up.

It is the obs footage from outside Johnny's house.

A split screen. On one camera he sees himself hand Ruth the book, his fingers lingering over hers. On the other Johnny stands at the window intently watching. He observes himself walk away and Ruth gaze after him. Johnny pauses, his concentration still on her and then he too disappears from view. Ruth glances across, registering that he is no longer there but instead of turning back to the house, she stands looking off down the road.

Harry can't think of a word adequate enough to describe the look on her face, but he knows it is causing his pulse to race.

As the picture cuts to black he is about to rerun it, but suddenly another split screen appears.

Night.

He stands under a street lamp, his collar turned up, his hands deep in his pockets, he shivers and leans against the lamppost. In the second image is the empty window of the main bedroom. Ruth steps into frame, caught in a shaft of soft yellow light. She sees him on the street below and she smiles. He watches himself watching her, sees the reassuring nod and sees himself fade away into the night.

The window cuts full frame. She peers out, trying to see him, in vain. She lifts the book that is in her hands, delicately stroking

her fingers over its cover and finally opening it carefully. She removes the handwritten paper from inside and she reads it.

And reads it. And reads it. And smiles.

The camera zooms tighter as she leans against the window, the paper raised to her face, brushing against her lips.

And even a stupid old fool can read what he needs to read from that beautiful, telling expression.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>We're nearly there ...<strong>

## 22. Chapter 22

**\*\*Forgive me ...I'm sorry. I just couldn't resist this as a stand alone.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Ruth is in love with Harry.<p>

Harry is in love with Ruth.

Ruth believes that Harry loves her and Harry believes that Ruth loves him.

And for the vast majority of the peoples of the earth, that should have been that.

Easy.

However, the trouble is, that Ruth doesn't know if Harry knows that she loves him.

And Harry doesn't know if Ruth knows that he loves her.

Therein lies the problem.

Because for two people with the propensity to over think the most straightforward of things, that complicates the shit out of everything.

## 23. Chapter 23

**\*\*Okay, I'm done. Three solid days at the laptop and I need to lie down now! Thanks for the lashings of support and comments. Here is the end - which I have to admit I'm not totally wild about and felt a little 'floundery' as I was writing it but hopefully it will just about do the trick.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Ruth returns to her desk. Through the office window she sees Harry's empty chair. She ventures to the roof.<p>

He is not there. She waits, hopeful that he may appear, but nothing and no one does.

And all she can process is that he was jealous.

Harry was jealous.

His actions, his procedural mistakes were because he could not cope with the thought of her and Johnny together.

And she wonders if the note in the book was indeed a message: a message not from James, but from Harry to her.

Harry stands by the river, reports abandoned.

She wants him.

He can't accept it. He's seen her face, he's seen the tenderness, the glow, the love.

But for him? Surely not for him. He shakes his head in disbelief.

As Ruth crosses the grid back to her desk, the pod doors open and Harry steps out.

Totally unexpectedly the two find themselves face to face.

"Hi," says Ruth.

"Hi," says Harry

Every single raw nerve is on edge: on edge with the most exquisite of tension.

So they stare at each other, until both turn away, because neither knows what should come next.

At six thirty Adam returns to the grid.

"How's it going?" he whispers.

Ros's eyebrows, jacked up by disdain, hit the ceiling.

"They're dancing round each other," says Jo, miserably

"Badly," mutters Ros, "It's like having to watch John Sergeant."

Adam sighs and decides that enough is most definitely enough.

Over an hour later he bursts through the office door.

"Harry"

"Adam. Knocking is most welcome, though not oft expected."

"Harry, there's a problem with Ruth,"

Now he has his attention.

"I think everything's just caught up with her. Jo spoke to her on the phone and she sounded in a bad way."

"She's at home?" Harry's coat is already half way on.

"Yes, home."

The pod doors swish closed.

"Better start praying for a miracle," pronounces Ros.

\* \* \*

><p>Ruth pours a glass of wine and tenderly turns Horace around in her hands.<p>

It's a beautiful book and a rare one. And yet she has not been asked to return it. If it had come out of the section's budget they would have been demanding it back the minute she returned to the grid.

But nothing. She decides that she'll keep hold of it until then.

Unlessâ€| unless this had nothing to do with budgets and expenses. Unless this truly was a gift.

She sets aside the book and stirs the onions that are simmering, stung by a cloud of steam and fumes. Blinking furiously she takes a mouthful of wine, spilling some on her pyjamas. She looks but can't really see anything, they're so tattered anyway it doesn't matter.

The knock comes just as she's grabbing a tissue to dab the wine.

She opens the door, tissue in hand, blinking as her eyes smart.

"Harry!" she exclaims, suddenly, horribly aware that she is wearing the least attractive nightwear since her grandmothers winceyette nightie.

"Can I come in, Ruth?"

His tone is insistent but gentle and brokers no denial.

She stands to one side.

He sits down on the sofa and indicates she should join him.

Her heartbeat had hit critical the moment she opened the door, but sat here like this, wearing no underwear and no make up...

"I thought you might need to talk about this, Ruth?"

"Iâ€|err..."

"I know it's difficult and these things can sometimes just â€|and it can be â€|overwhelming."

She is definitely overwhelmed.

He, on the other hand, appears entirely focused on her and fortunately seems to be paying no attention whatsoever to the shabbiness and total lack of sex appeal of her apparel. Maybe there was the hint of the paternal there after all.

Nervously she balls up the tissue in her hands.

He reaches into his breast pocket and offers her his silk handkerchief.

It seems rude not to take it and he proffers it with such gentleness.

"Thanks," she says and stares at him, getting lost, watching him as he studiously searches her face.

It's when his eyes meet hers that his intent for being here, his concern, seem to stall and get distracted.

She has the sharpest, smartest, bluest eyes he has ever seen. They are piercing and he is impaled.

\_This isn't helping, Harry. Say something.\_

"Tea, I'll make you some tea. Sweet tea for a shock." And he is on his feet.

"I'd rather have wine," she suggests.

"Best stay away from alcohol until you feel better."

"I don't feel ill."

"But you're upset," he nods at the discarded tissue.

"Onions," she says.

"Onions?"

She nods.

"You're not upset?"

"Only in that I look like a bag of spanners and you have me at a total disadvantage."

"I've seen worse looking bags of spanners," he says lamely.

"Was that an attempt at a compliment, Harry?" she smiles.

"I couldn't exactly say what I really thinking."

The air in the room is suddenly startlingly still and thin.

"I'll get the wine," he turns to the kitchen.

"I'll change," she gets up, "Help yourself."



"Please don't."

"Sorry, what?"

"Please don't change."

"But Iâ€¦"

"You look beautiful, Ruth," he smiles softly, "That's what I really thought â€¦think."

\_Say something, anything, she screams to herself, but don't mention  
basques or winceyette!\_

"Well, you could at least take your tie and jacket off and make me  
feel a little less undressed."

\_Oh shit, Ruth that's nearly as bad.\_

"What ever you want," he offers, with what she can only conclude is  
the sexiest smile she has ever feltâ€¦ not seenâ€¦felt!

When he sits back down with two glasses and begins to take off his  
tie as instructed the silence is compounded once more.

She pulls her legs up to her chest, arms wrapped around them.

"Is that defensive body language, Ruth?"

"Well, you've got your tie off and we know where that can lead."

He wraps it around his hand,

"He deserved it."

She nods.

"Are you sure you're alright, Ruth?"

"Wish I had a pound for every time I've been asked that in the last  
couple of days."

"Deflection."

"I'm fine. Really," she hesitates, burning to push this, to prompt  
him, "In fact, Harry, the whole experience has been quite  
â€¦instructive."

Is she talking about Johnny? Or could it be him? And those eyes, full  
of mischief.

"How so?"

Oh, good spook. Question with a question.

"Deflection," she echoes back, with a smile.

"Why do I get the feeling I'm being played, Ruth?"

"Played? You? By me?"

"Yes, by little old you," he smiles, "The brightest button in the box."

"We've strayed on to haberdashery nowâ€¦\_that's\_ deflection, Harry."

He laughs.

"Okay. What do you want to know?"

And now it comes to it, she wonders what to say.

"Called your bluff, have I?"

That sexy smile is back. Look away Ruth. Look away before you get lost.

But she is lost. Lost in the hazel web.

So lost that she doesn't think before she speaks.

"I want to know if you feel how I feel, Harry?"

"That depends how you feel, Ruth?"

And neither have looked away, neither have blinked.

"I â€¦ wellâ€¦Iâ€¦"

"Hesitation," he smiles, "And repetition."

"Harry, please!"

"I love you, Ruth. That's how I feel."

And there it is.

"I have done for a long time, it just took me a little while to accept that it wasn't just me being a stupid old fool."

"You don't have any paternal feelings?" She blurts out.

"For you?"

She nods.

"No, Ruth I don't have one ounce of paternal feeling towards you. What I'd like is far, far removed from that."

She blushes slightly, the corners of her mouth crinkling with pleasure.

"Does it involve wearing a basque?" she asks, the mischief back in her eyes.

"I'm a man, Ruth, I'm not going to say no, though to be brutally honest I need to admit that those pyjamas are really rather sexy."

She laughs shaking her head.

"I know your game" he takes her hand, "Deflection again."

"From what?" she twists their hands towards her so that the back of his rests against the material over her chest.

"Add distraction to that," he smiles, flexing his fingers against her, "Not fair, Ruth."

"So tell me what I'm deflecting from, Harry?"

"Your question" and I quote 'I want to know if you feel how I feel?'"

"Yes," she says with the single most stunning smile he has ever felt, "Yes, Harry, I feel how you feel." She twists their hands back so that it is now hers that rests against his chest.

"I have for a very long time, it just took me a while to realise it might ever be reciprocated."

He leans a little closer, trapping their hands, his face hovering before her, their lips almost touching.

"I swear that I will reciprocate anything and everything that you so desire, Ruth."

"Okay," she whispers, "...Reciprocate this," and she kisses him.

End  
file.